



A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
COVERING VIDEO GAMES, ANIMÉ,
AND RELATED TOPICS
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ON SCREEN CHAOS



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Castle Vania



Cover art by Shawn "The Shred Man" Dumas

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ON SCREEN CHAOS

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WELCOME!

...to yet another issue of *On Screen Chaos*! We're rapidly approaching the one-year mark, and I must admit that I'm surprised and pleasantly pleased that we've lasted this long, but it's hard to believe we've been at it since last July. We're planning a gala special issue marking our one-year anniversary next month, so be sure not to miss it!

I would also like to use my space here to congratulate Svenyip on his victory in the OSFF-ED finals, and to commend him for his work on the OSFF-ED web site (URL later this issue). It's a great, Svenyippity page that everyone with 'Net access should really check out.

I also feel that I need to apologize for my own failure to keep the main On Screen site updated. I'm considering asking someone to take on the role of full-time Webmaster, simply because the demands of my family, the newsletter, and the OSFF, don't leave me much time leftover to devote to the web site. But keep checking the site for periodic updates.

Additionally, I need to congratulate Happosai on his efforts in ending my title reign as OSFF champion.

And finally, I want to also say thanks to the Shred Man, who despite his busy schedule, always manages to find time to knock out a killer cover. Thanks, dude.

-TONY "XOT" MORSE
On Screen Editor

R.I.P.

SEGA SATURN 1995-1998

Sega has announced that as of June, 1998, they will no longer be producing or distributing the Sega Saturn, and the final titles to be released for the system will be out by the end of July.

On Screen mourns the passing of a great system that never realized its full potential.

Xot's

CLASSIC CORNER

Perspectives on Retrogaming Collecting Arcade Machines *An introduction to a rewarding hobby*

TONY "XOT" MORSE
On Screen Editor

With the ever-increasing quality of home ports and the huge number of emulators and collection discs out there, collecting arcade machines may seem like more trouble than it's worth. And to some degree, I'd have to say that's true. It certainly isn't worth it to shell out thousands of dollars for a *Tekken 3* machine when a Playstation home port will do just nicely. But there are still dozens of games for which a good home port simply does not exist, and playing them emulated in a tiny window with a keyboard just doesn't cut it.

So what you need is an arcade machine. I've now been involved in the sale and/or transport of four of these beasts (two of which are my own), and while I'm by no means an expert, I'm at least experienced.

The obvious thing that any aspiring arcade collector needs to do is decide what he wants to own. That's usually pretty easy; you can then start perusing some groups on the 'Net (rec.games.video.arcade.collecting, and r.g.v.a.c.marketplace) or start calling local amusement machine distributors and see if they've got what you're looking for. But then, you're likely to pay a premium price, because they know you want what they've got, and *they're* doing *you* a service. In my experience, there's a better way.

Most arcade operators won't cut you a deal when they're unloading old games. The key is to hit those small-time game operators: pool halls, bowling alleys, mom-and-pop stores, etc. They're the ones that usually have one or two "obsolete" games lurking in the corners. But what's "obsolete" to them may be "classic" to you!

My *Jr. Pac-Man* is certainly a classic, but the owner I bought it from had it in a pool hall where mostly teenagers hung out, and nowadays, no teenager respects the *Pac-Man* legacy. So when I saw that, I asked the owner if anybody ever played it. Turns out, the game wasn't making him any money. So, I offered him a fair amount of cash for it, and we *both* came away happy. He finally made some money on an old game he thought was worth-

Continued on Page 7

MK Mythologies full of freezing frustration

System: Sony Playstation
Publisher: Midway
Release Date: October, 1997

MICHAEL "SVENYIP" TROUPE On Screen Correspondent

The *Mortal Kombat Mythologies* series was an interesting idea— to try and expand on the history and the universe of *Mortal Kombat* by giving different characters individual “quest adventures” that took place in the past. (Future *Mythology* adventures are planned for both Raiden and Liu Kang.)

MKM: Sub-Zero plays a lot like *Ultimate MK3* in terms of game control. The blocking, the running, and the dial-a-combos are identical to the unmasked Sub-Zero from *UMK3*. The only additions are a button is necessary to turn around, another button is used to pick up items, and when you pause the game you go to a screen where you can use the various items you've collected throughout the quest.

You gain Experience Points through fighting, the main purpose of which is to teach Sub-Zero his various ice powers. He begins the game unable to use any of his special abilities, but soon gains the standard ice ball and the slide in the first stage. (Each stage has a limit on how much experience Sub-Zero can get, so he will be unable to gain his most powerful skills too soon.) Later stages get him the ground freeze, a diagonally-upward ice shot, an Ice Shatter attack, and other abilities that he's never had in any MK game to date.

Fighting most of the generic enemies is fairly easy. A freeze followed by a dial-a-combo or two is generally sufficient to defeat any of them. The biggest challenge in

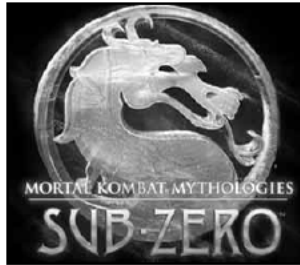
the game is learning the environment and the hazards that each stage has to offer. The first level, for example, has falling pillars that will squash you and kill you immediately unless you sweep to trigger them, then run past while they are raising back up. And the second level has a lot of timed jumping— if you don't jump at the right time and land in the right place, kiss your life goodbye.

That is perhaps the most frustrating thing about *Mortal Kombat Mythologies*. Until you learn how to control Sub-Zero well, you're going to die— and die a lot. Even once you get by a stage, you're probably going to need to re-do it until you can get by it losing as few lives as possible— as your lives and continues remaining are saved from level to level.

With each stage that you complete, you'll see a neat full motion video movie showing developments in the plot. While the acting isn't incredible, it's at least bearable, better than most B-movies that are out there, and a nice reward for all the stress you probably had to deal with to get that far.

If you're a fan of *Mortal Kombat* and can deal with frustrating games, you may enjoy *MKM: Sub-Zero*. If you get ticked off at a game easily, you may want to pass on this one. (I've only made it to the third level, myself, and have no real urge to play it again in the near future.)

One last thing— although the Nintendo 64 version of this game came out almost two months after the Playstation version, there weren't really any improvements in the game. The cinema scenes were removed, due to the lack of CD, replaced by still shots of the characters and text of the once-spoken dialogue. And, of course, the game supports the Rumble Pack— isn't every N64 game *required* to support the Rumble Pack nowadays?



The biggest symptom of the downfall of fighting games

It's been well documented in *On Screen Chaos* that the majority of us feel that the end of the arcade era is upon us, and that this may be a result of the waning popularity of one-on-one fighting games. Well, I'd today I'd like to talk about what seems to be the biggest reason for that decline.

On a recent trip to Hadley, Mass. for what we hoped would be some rousing games of *Marvel vs. Capcom*, we witnessed a depressing spectacle. To sum it up, we never got on the machine. Why? Because we refused to play Ryu and Mega Man.

One individual held the machine for well over thirty wins, using the team of Ryu and Roll. Shawn and I had planned on playing some of the newer characters that we hadn't yet mastered, such as Jin, Strider, Captain Commando, or Venom. So rather than waste our fifty cents per game getting trashed by an obvious master of his team, we waited patiently. At least, we figured, we'd get to watch some of the other characters in action and perhaps pick up on some new strategies.

What we witnessed appalled us. Of perhaps twenty opponents this man faced, **every single one** selected a team that included either Ryu or Mega Man. This rapidly became boring, as we've seen these characters so many times before.

So we got to thinking: this is what's wrong with fighting games. While we often complain about the lack of originality in

the newer fighters, it suddenly dawned on us: People don't want originality anymore.

People don't want to sit down and learn a new, interesting character. They want to see a new game, find the Shotokan character (Ryu, Ken, Akuma, Mega Man, etc.) and instantly kick ass. This ends up turning off people like us, who *don't* want to play these characters. We've been playing Ken and Ryu for years; so has everyone else. How can you compete against someone with ten years of Ryu practice with a character you've never played? It's a waste of money, something that's all too rare around these parts.

Street Fighter III was a commercial failure, despite being an outstanding game— probably because it was too different. Nobody liked having to learn how to parry. Very few people bothered learning how to use the new, unique characters. The few competitors we encountered while playing *SF3* were mostly, you guessed it, Kens, Ryus, and Seans.

We had hoped that with the merging of Akuma, Ryu, and Ken into one character, *MvC* had taken steps to remedy this problem. But the all too-Ryu like Spider Man, Captain America, Morrigan, and especially Mega Man fill the second Shotokaner roll all too easily.

Originality is dead, my friends. It's no longer in style.

—Xot

SotN shows why 2-D games should never die

System: Sony Playstation

Publisher: Konami

Developer: KCET

Release Date: October, 1996 (?)

TONY "XOT" MORSE
On Screen Editor

Simply put, *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* is the best new video game I've played since *Puzzle Fighter*. It was always one of those games that I said I'd get around to renting one day to see if it was any good, and once I got my hands on it, I simply had to own it.

SotN takes place shortly after *Castlevania: Bloodlines* (the only *Castlevania* game on the Sega Genesis). After you finish a redrawn version of the last level of *Bloodlines* (for those of us who never finished, or even played, it), you assume the role of Dracula's familiar son, Alucard. It seems that *Castlevania* has re-emerged from the mists of time, and Alucard is determined to stop his father from taking more human souls.

The opening is a nicely drawn sequence of SGI-style graphics, with a bit of text on what's supposed to be going on. Once you get into the meat of the game, it looks very familiar: you start by racing into *Castlevania* and beating on a horde of zombies in the main hallway with your morning star. Once you reach the end of this hallway, though, everything changes. You're stripped of all your weaponry, and your quest truly begins.

The best description I can give this game is that it's a cross between

the original *Castlevania* and *Super Metroid*. While retaining many of the elements of the classic *Castlevania* games, *SotN* mixes in several RPG-type elements to produce a solid adventure game.

Like the *Castlevania*'s of old, you can still attack candles and the like to acquire items, which consume heart points to use. You can still collect money bags, although now they are used to purchase items. And, of course, the story takes place in Count Dracula's old, familiar haunt, so there's plenty of enemies lurking that we've seen before.

KCET expanded on these elements by making the game one gigantic level, in which certain items are required before you can access key points in the game. Typically, you will find an area that cannot be reached until you gain the ability to change your form, from a vampyre to a bat or to mist, for example. There are also a variety of weapons that can substitute for your trusty morning star, and you can choose to equip two weapons, one in each hand, or a weapon and a shield. Keeping with its RPG feel, your life gauge has been converted to Hit Points, and you gain experience and levels which affect some basic attributes. You also have the ability to wear and use magical armors and items.

This game truly shines in the cosmetic department, though. KCET does a fantastic job creating the perfect mood for this game. The soundtrack is simply haunting, and it seems every time I say a game has

the best music I've ever heard, something comes along and outdoes it. So I won't say it again here. The graphics are stunning, with such wonderful details as prisoners banging on cell walls, the clangs of knocked-over vases, and the bouncing of opponent's skulls. It seems KCET was quite happy to lose Nintendo's restrictions on graphic subject matter, as there's a fair amount of gratuitous blood. And I just can't explain how *cool* Alucard looks with multiple blue shadows following him everywhere. It would be a shame not to mention how well animated this game is.

All of your interaction with NPC's is completely spoken, too, and the voice actors do a very nice job. Granted, it's still obviously acted, but Alucard's voice is very appropriate, and it's some of the best voice acting yet in a video game with this kind of production value.

And just when I was ready to say the game was too easy, I was made aware of a second, *inverted* castle, with tougher enemies and dozens of new items to find. Suddenly, the size of the quest doubled. I'm eager to continue exploring, and since it has multiple endings, I'm looking forward to more epic confrontations.

This game is a perfect example of how a quality 2-D game can successfully compete in the same market as 3-D titles. Many gamers like myself still prefer a solid side-scroller to a messy polygon-a-thon. *Symphony of the Night* has an addictive quality that no 3-D game I've played has ever matched.

So, once again, I'll close an article with a message to all present and future game programmers: *we need more games like this one.*



On Screen Fighting Federation: Eastern Division champion crowned!

Unlike the tournament to decide the first On Screen Fighting Federation champion, the OSFF-ED belt was *not* decided in a single day. It was a span of several weeks, filled with incompatible time schedules, the removal of a undesired game for a more competitive one, and a series of unexpected victories before the first champion of the OSFF: Eastern Division was crowned.

The main On-Screen belt and the Eastern Division belt have their own sets of sanctioned games. For example, *Bloody Roar*, *Bushido Blade* and *Psychic Force* are all not sanctioned for World Title defenses, but are permitted for the Eastern Division.

The main thing I was looking to achieve was a competitive tournament, because with the hours I've spent on many games, I'd have a real advantage if too many of them had been in the tournament. So we had a collection of somewhat odd games in

the tournament.

I won the tournament and became the first OSFF-ED champion, but only managed to beat my closest competitor, Chris Lavin by four points. The numbers don't tell the whole tale, either. I beat Chris 2-0 in *Battle Arena Toshinden* and *Soul Blade*, he beat me 2-0 in *Bloody Roar* and *Psychic Force*, and we split in *Bushido Blade*, *Tekken 3*, and *Virtua Fighter 2*.

In simple terms, the fights between Chris and myself were inconclusive, at best. The title defenses that take place in the near future should be very interesting, to say the least.

—Svenyip

Video Girl Ai: Insufferably cute but worth it

Series: *Video Girl Ai*

Number of Episodes: 6

Fansubber: *Aquarian Productions*

MICHAEL "SVENYIP" TROUPE
On Screen Correspondent

I liked *Video Girl Ai* a lot, although it's definitely not one of those series that you'd want to watch with too many other people. It's one to break out on one of those rainy evenings when you're alone and feeling introspective, and want to ponder human nature for a while.

Well, actually it's not *that* deep, at least not right away. It's a love story for the most part, where the main character, Youta, is depressed because the woman he loves has fallen for another man. He seems more depressed, though, about the fact that the man that she loves seems to be indifferent to her affections.

So on the way home, he rents a tape of a "Video Girl" to help cheer himself up. He does so from a shop he's never seen before, and doesn't think twice about the fact that the owner is rambling on about how only people with pure hearts can ever find or rent from the store. I'm not *exactly* sure what the purpose of Video Girls are in Japan, but I can say with a fair degree of certainty that they normally don't leave the tapes they are on to interact with their watchers in real life.

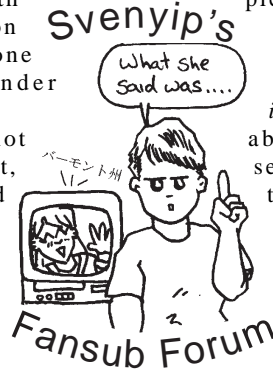
That, of course, is what happens with the Video Girl

Ai. She is allowed to spend a month with Youta, to try and cheer him up, and during that time makes it her goal to try and get Youta together with the woman that he loves. Youta played the video tape on a damaged VCR, however, which resulted in certain... alterations to Ai's normal style of being. Effectively, she ended up being more masculine and less endowed, and is NOT very pleased with Youta about either of these facts.

I should warn you in advance that if "cute" animé makes you ill, *Video Girl Ai* might cause you to lose your lunch. Ai-chan is often *insufferably* cute, but in an endearing and likeable sort of way. I was disappointed that the series only had six episodes, especially because the sixth goes off in a *very* weird direction and ends somewhat inconclusively. That's probably because there were another twelve manga involving Video Girl Ai that the animé never touched on.

Video Girl Ai is another well-drawn animé that I highly recommend (especially because it's more affordable to most budgets with there being only six episodes). But expect the last episode to somewhat confuse you, because it's not at all like the other five. This is one of the few animé I own that neither ChiAnime nor Tomadachi distributes. But several other people have it, so it shouldn't be too hard to track down a copy.

OVERALL RATING: 9/10 (I've watched the series two or three times so far. It has an odd appeal to it.)



Yawara provides lighthearted mind candy

Series: *Yawara— A Fashionable Judo Girl*

Number of Episodes: 100+ (16 subtitled to date)

Fansubber: *Neko Creations*

MICHAEL "SVENYIP" TROUPE
On Screen Correspondent

Yawara is an old animé— the original episodes were seen on television for the first time back in 1989. It's a lighthearted series that tells a good story and has perhaps one of the most memorable characters in any animé that I've seen to date.

It's not too complex a tale, all things considered. Yawara is a seventeen year old girl who has trained in Judo almost all of her life. Her grandfather, the only person to have ever won five elite Judo tournaments back-to-back, has been keeping Yawara and her skills in hiding, and plans to have her skills revealed in a sensational media blitz which will end with her winning the National Achievement Award and the Gold Medal at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona. Yawara, however, tires of the continual training and wants only to be a normal girl with a normal life.

At the time the story opens, a reporter for a third-rate sports magazine sees Yawara instinctively use her Judo training to stop a purse snatcher. He's wanted his whole life to become a hero in some sport or another, but he was never able to acquire the skills in any to do so. Seeing Yawara sparks this old ambition once more, and he tries to learn more about Yawara as he is convinced she could become the future of Judo. The grandfather, however, refuses to let some third-rate sports magazine be responsible for Yawara's debut, and does his best to

keep the reporter in the dark.

The main character, Yawara, by herself probably wouldn't have been enough for me to want to see more of the series. But her grandfather is *great*. There's just something infinitely appealing about this seventy year old man (who looks a lot like Dr. Wily from the Mega Man series, by the way) outfoxing everybody and sitting in the background, sticking his tongue out at all the oblivious people he just manipulated.

I can't emphasize enough just how great the grandfather is. The first half of the first episode was rather slow and I was unimpressed— up until the grandfather starts showing his devious mind in action. Then I was hooked. The story gets better as it continues, as well.

Yawara— A Fashionable Judo Girl is good "mind candy" to watch, and I highly recommend it to anybody that likes animé with a lighter tone to it. The only problem is that only 16 of the episodes have been fansubbed at this point, and the entire series takes well over a hundred. So if you don't mind getting a series that you'll probably never be able to see the end of, give *Yawara* a try. I recommend ordering from ChiAnime on the net. ChiAnime is an official distributor of Neko Creations fansubs, has the cheapest prices I've seen anywhere— 3 Tapes for \$15— and if you pay with cash or money order, the turnaround time for your order may take less than a week.

OVERALL RATING: 9/10 (My rating may be a little high because I wrote this a couple days after I first saw the series. But it's also a series that I've already gone back and watched a couple of the earlier episodes over again— and I rarely do that so quickly.)

Armored Core an excellent mech adventure



System: Sony Playstation
Publisher: Sony
Release Date: October, 1997

MICHAEL "SVENYIP" TROUPE
On Screen Correspondent

I don't generally enjoy mech or robot games at all (Mega Man being an exception, but I don't suppose that really counts), but *Armored Core* is proof that I'll be willing to play just about any style of game provided it's done well enough.

Armored Core is done very well. You start with a barely adequate mech, using it to complete various missions that you choose assigned to you from two different rival organizations vying for control of the planet you're on. The missions you successfully complete will affect the later stages of the game, as one side or the other will become stronger as a result of your actions.

Successfully completing missions earns you credits, which you put towards upgrading your mech.

There are a *lot* of ways your mech can be modified, including head, arms, legs, main body, generator, main weapon, close-combat weapon, shoulder weapon and more. Until I played through a few missions, I was finding that my repairs (to replenish ammo and restore armor strength) were almost costing me as much as I earned in each mission. The first thing I did was upgrade my main weapon to an energy rifle— not having to pay to replenish ammo helped the cash flow a lot.

The neat thing is that there are so many different mech types you can construct, and certain designs are more appropriate for certain missions. Some may call for a heavy, heavily armored mech with heavy weapons that moves at a snail's pace, while others may need the speed and enhanced maneuverability that a lightweight mech with spider legs can provide. Late in the game, you'll be able to customize your mech for each mission, because unlike most games, *Armored Core* gives you a full 100% of the value for any unneeded mech parts that you sell back.

You see the missions from a "just behind the mech" perspective. Most of the early ones can be com-

pleted with any mech that has the ability to move and has some sort of weapon. As you proceed, you'll find that mechs that have no ability to boost jump are doomed to failure, because you may not be able to reach the end of an area and defeat the final enemies. Some stages also have you being attacked by fellow Ravens (the organization that you belong to) that were paid by the opposing group to try to defend the objective from people like you.

While the plot was somewhat limited, the desire to get "just one more upgrade" for the mech kept me coming back to the game. As far as I know, I reached the final stage of the game, but that was this annoying precision jump area that I couldn't get a good enough camera view to be able to manage, and I eventually gave up in frustration.

Overall, though, *Armored Core* is a game that you could easily spend several afternoons and a couple complete plays through before you'd get tired of it. It's easily steps above the only other mech-type game for the Playstation, *Mechwarrior 2: Arcade Combat Edition*, which gave you almost no ability to customize your mechs at all.

Battle Arena Kids: Cheesy, cutesy kiddie combat

System: Sony Playstation
Publisher: Takara
Release Date: 1996

MICHAEL "SVENYIP" TROUPE
On Screen Correspondent

You know, some games that are made for kids or that have the word "Kids" in their title end up being almost as complex or even more complicated than the game that spawned their creation in the first place. *Virtua Fighter Kids*, for the Sega Saturn, is one of these games.

Not so for *Battle Arena Nitoshinden* (Battle Arena Kids). What you have here is an eight character fighting game that's about as basic as they come. Four of the characters are from previous Battle Arena games (Eiji, Sofia, Tracy, and Ellis) and four others were invented for this game alone. In addition, our old friend Vermilion is available to fight if you get through all your battles without needing to continue, and if you defeat him, you can use him in versus play until you power down the system.

As far as the gameplay goes, you can move, jump and duck with the controller, and sidestep with two of the top buttons. Your other six buttons are used for your four regular attacks, special technique and



"parry." That's it. No motions are necessary, or available, to attempt special moves, because even your regular attacks are specials. For Eiji, he has versions of his slide, fireball and sword uppercut which can be done just with the tap of a button.

The "parry" is kind of neat. If you block a move with the parry attack, your opponent is left out of position for a second or two, during which you can counter-attack. After a while, though, you'll discover that just about every character in the game has one move they can buffer in over and over again to combo. Fortunately, after four successive hits, you are sent flying away so you can't just mash on one button and win the entire round.

The graphics are drawn in this weird sort of "paper cutout" 3-D. The background is continually moving, with trees and buildings bouncing around in a way that almost makes you wonder if the designer was taking some sort of illegal drug while programming it.

There is a "tutorial mode" where a Japanese woman and one of the game characters (drawn in, of course) exchange banter and explain how each part of the game works. It's not much help since it, and most of the other text in the game, is all in Japanese. But as you can probably tell, you don't really need it.

All in all, *Battle Arena Nitoshinden* is a cute game that will probably convince even the most die-hard of fighting game lovers to try something else.

Collecting arcade machines can be a lot less difficult than it sounds

Continued from Page 2

less, and I got my first arcade game, in pretty decent shape, for less than it's probably worth.

You see, the best way to get a good deal is to happen across it. Operators who have an excess of classic titles that just don't make money will unload their machines for a song, as Svenyip's *WWF Superstars* and my *Rolling Thunder* can attest to. If you come across a game you might want, ask if it's for sale. You'll be surprised how often you can get a decent machine this way. And don't be afraid to haggle— if the game isn't making any money, suddenly *you're* doing *them* a favor.

Moving these monsters can be a pain, though. So if you don't have a pickup truck or a friend who does, forget about it. These things are *big*, and need lots of room. And they're *heavy*; usually three or four people are required to get them up or down a set of stairs, if your location requires.

The most important thing to remember when transporting an arcade machine is to remove all the loose parts inside (especially the coin box and any leftover quarters or tokens), and to lock up anything that can swing, like the lock box door or, on some machines, the marquee. Moving parts can damage themselves and any-

thing they hit, especially the oh-so-sensitive monitor components. A hand truck is especially helpful in moving the machine across flat surfaces; if you've ever moved a refrigerator, it's roughly the same, but a bit heavier. Of course, weight and size vary by machine, mostly due to monitor size. About 75% of a machine's weight is in the monitor.

Documentation is seldom included in one of these, but there are several locations on the 'Net where you can get important information like DIP switch settings, which control things like the cost and number of lives per game. Not all games have a free play option, so you may want to have a pail of quarters or tokens ready to recycle through your game. The alternative is to leave the front door open and keep tripping the coin switches, which is both awkward for you and rough on the switches.

I realize this is by no means a comprehensive guide to buying an arcade machine, but it'll help you get started. It's really not as hard a hobby to jump into as I thought. All you really need is some disposable income and a *lot* of empty space. Of course, basic electrical knowledge helps too. (If you don't know what it does, for god's sake, **don't touch it!**)



Left, Svenyip proudly poses with his first arcade machine, *WWF Superstars*. Above, Xot's *Rolling Thunder*, stored together with *Superstars* in his parents' garage.

say **WHA7??!!**

Street Fighter: EX+Alpha edition

This game has the most, and some of the best, special move quotes to warp, so here are some of our favorites!

"Yoga Retchin'!" —Dhalsim's Yoga Legend

"In da bucket!" —Darun's Indra Bridge

"I'm just a teeny pig" —Darun's Ganjis DDT

"Oh, Simba." —Darun's winning pose

"Study in Budapest!" —Pullum's Drill Purrus

"Can you kick?!" —Pullum's Ten'el Kick

"Cream kick!" —Pullum's Purum Kick

"Let's try harder!" (or)

"Eat my Iguana!" —Pullum's Res Arcana

"Stone Cold" —Allen's Soul Force

"Skull heads off!" —Skullomania's Skull Head

"It's more and you know it"

—Computer-controlled Bison's entrance

A chink finally appears in Square's armor

While Einhänder provides some solid shoot-em-up action...



System: Sony Playstation

Publisher: Squaresoft

Release Date: May, 1998

MICHAEL "SVENYIP" TROUPE
On Screen Correspondent

One thing the Playstation, and any next-generation system for that matter, has been lacking is good shoot-em-up games. (The best one I've seen for the Playstation, *Raystorm*, can be picked up for about \$20-25 new, and is definitely still worth that price.) *Thunder Force V*, the continuation of one of the best shooter series for the Sega Genesis, *did* come out for the Sega Saturn but was never released in

America. Fortunately, Sony somehow got the rights to release *Thunder Force V* for the Playstation, and work is currently being done on that.

But until that day, the best shooter out right now would have to be the one recently released for the Sony Playstation by Squaresoft, called *Einhänder*. It has a definite German atmosphere to it, as it's a German name and much of the in-stage random babble is spoken in German (I believe... I don't know the language at all).

Gameplay feels a lot like the old *R-Type* series of games. Your spacecraft (of which you can choose three different types at first, and it claims two additional models can be unlocked through gameplay) has a standard rapid-fire gun, and you can pick up various power pods to be able to shoot special, temporary, weapons.

The graphics are amazing and crisp, and the action proceeds at a steady fast pace, without any noticeable slowdown. The only real "flaw" it suffers from is that which most shooters have—lack of variety during replay. While the appearance of a new boss enemy may be impressive, it loses a lot of the impressing factor the tenth time around when you have to sit through the same transforming sequence and fight it with a tried-and-true pattern of attack.

Unless you're a shooter addict, it might not be worth buying, but if you're a fan of this genre at all, *Einhänder* is definitely worth at least a rental. After all, it was made by Square, and there's never been a Square game that's failed to somewhat impress me—with the exception of *Saga Frontier*, which I'll go into detail about later in this issue ...

...Saga Frontier marks a major failure in the role-playing department

System: Sony Playstation

Publisher: Squaresoft

Release Date: March, 1998

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I must be getting old.

I never thought the day would come that Square would release a game, an RPG at that, and I wouldn't feel the urge to play through the whole game until I'd seen all that it had to offer.

But *Saga Frontier* is that game.

It's an interesting concept, in that you choose one of seven different main characters, each of whom has their own goals and objectives to complete in the world before they can encounter their "final boss" and either save the world, themselves, or accomplish some other, more obscure task.

The game plays a lot like the *Final Fantasy* games released for the Game Boy. You have basic classes of Humans (who can use the most different equipment and learn the most weapon-based techniques), Mystics (who can learn some weapon techniques as well as other, mystic-only skills) and Monsters (who can absorb abilities from other defeated monsters, and in so doing, morph into an entirely different type of monster).

The problem is, I play RPGs for the plot, and *Saga Frontier* is often lacking in plot. A few of the characters have very straightforward "go to location A to accomplish objective B," but some characters seem to have no

plot whatsoever unless they happen to blunder into the right place at the right time.

The half-mystic character, Asellus, was the one I chose first, and that was a big mistake. It took me several hours of fruitless wandering to get out of the first area alone, and then I soon found myself roaming the world at large, with no objectives whatsoever. Little did I know that I had to wait for assassins to show up (which would only appear at a few key locations) and defeat them before the plot, such as it was, would advance.

In addition, there are a lot of quests that all seven characters can do—like acquiring certain types of magic. And while they might be interesting the first time, having to do the same thing over and over again in each scenario could rapidly become tedious.

Finally, the graphics are nothing to write home about. While that normally doesn't mean anything to me (I love games like *Dragon Warrior IV*, which I'm afraid the current generation of gamers would never bother to play because it "doesn't look as good as *Final Fantasy VII*"), I just don't like the style of the characters and the presentation of the attacks—it reminds me of *Phantasy Star III* at times, with its unimpressive combat strikes.

Maybe if there weren't other games for me to play instead at the time, things like *Final Fantasy Tactics*, *Tactics Ogre* and the impending *Breath of Fire 3* (which should be out by the time you read this), I'd have had the patience to play through *Saga Frontier*. But the game wasn't intriguing enough for me to actually care enough to get far into it.

